DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 480 923 HE 036 148

AUTHOR	Belcheir, Marcia J.; Cucek, Mira
TITLE	Student Perceptions of Their Distance Education Courses. Research Report 2001-04.
INSTITUTION	Boise State Univ., ID. Office of Institutional Assessment.
REPORT NO	BSU-RR-2001-04
PUB DATE	2001-12-00
NOTE	16p.; Colored figures may not reproduce well.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*College Students; *Distance Education; *Enrollment; Higher Education; Student Attitudes; *Student Characteristics; Student Surveys
IDENTIFIERS	*Boise State University ID

ABSTRACT

This study sought to learn more about students who enroll in distance education classes at Boise State University, their satisfaction with distance education classes, perceived access to support services, and differences in their "classroom" behavior in distance education and traditional face-to-face classes. These questions were addressed through a survey of students enrolled in distance education in spring 2001. About 35% of Boise State distance education students responded to the survey (n=379). A majority were enrolled in Internet courses, but other delivery methods included one- or two-way audio or video that allowed interaction, videotapes or television instruction, and direct instruction in off-campus classrooms. The main reason for taking distance education courses was that the time was flexible and convenient. Another reason was the difficulty respondents had in getting to the campus. About 30% were taking distance education courses because they liked the technology. Slightly more than half indicated that in the absence of the distance education option, they would take the course at some other institution or not at all. Students were generally satisfied with their distance education courses, with interaction with other students and the instructor being the areas of least satisfaction. They reported that their course-related behaviors were similar in distance education and traditional classes. Students identified delivery method and lack of interaction as the biggest barriers to distance education. These findings, from a student perspective, suggest that distance education is convenient and satisfactory. (SLD)

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Research Reports

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Student Perceptions of Their Distance Education Courses

Research Report 2001-04
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December 2001

Abstract

Distance education (DE) is a growing enterprise at Boise State University. The number of distance education classes and students has doubled in the past five years. The pace of growth seems to be accelerating further as students request more distance education courses (especially over the internet) and the university undertakes a grant to deliver core courses via the internet.

This study sought to learn more about the students who enroll in distance education classes, their satisfaction with their DE classes, perceived access to support services, and differences in their "classroom" behaviors in DE and traditional face-to-face classes. Questions were addressed through a survey of students enrolled in distance education classes during the Spring of 2001.

About 35% responded to the survey. A majority were enrolled in internet courses. Other delivery methods included one- or two-way audio and/or video instruction that allowed interaction, videotapes or TV instruction, and direct instruction in off-campus classrooms. More than half had previously taken other distance education courses.

The main reason students took DE courses was that the time was convenient and/or flexible (mentioned by over 80% of respondents). Over half indicated that another reason was the difficulty they had getting to the main campus in Boise. About 30% were taking distance education classes because they liked the technology.

Slightly less than half said they would come to the Boise campus if they couldn't take the course through distance education. The remainder indicated they either would take the course elsewhere or not take it at all.

Students were generally satisfied with their distance education classes. They were most satisfied with the facilities, equipment, and instructor skill at using the delivery method. They were least satisfied with their interactions with other students, as well as with the instructor. Still, less than

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20 % of the students indicated they were dissatisfied with the level of interaction. Students also felt they had adequate access to most services (e.g., library resources, registration, books, academic advising).

Students reported that their course-related behaviors were often similar in distance education and traditional classes. Two areas of difference, however, stood out. DE students were more likely to search for an answer to their questions than ask the instructor and less likely to discuss the ideas and concepts of the course with the instructor. Thus, it appeared that less interaction was occurring in distance education classes. Students, however, enjoyed these courses as much or more than traditional classroom courses.

Students were also asked what were the greatest barriers to completing their DE courses. The largest group of responses related to delivery method and included lack of interaction, the way the course was structured, and access to resources. Less frequently mentioned barriers were time, the technology itself, and personal issues such as motivation and self-discipline.

Throughout the study, differences were found based on delivery method. For example, students in internet classes were more likely to say that they enrolled because they liked the technology and that they would take the course at another institution if Boise State didn't offer it. They spent more time on work and less on childcare than other DE students. They were more likely to ask for clarification when they didn't understand something, apply what they had learned to the "real world," indicate they enjoyed the course, and tell the instructor when they had complaints about the course. Internet students were more likely to report time, group or team work, and technology as barriers. On the other hand, students taking AV and TV courses were more likely to report that lack of interaction was a barrier, probably due to the nature of the delivery method.

Findings from this study indicate that distance education classes are a convenient and satisfactory way for students to gain further education. These results, of course, are entirely from the student perspective. A companion survey for faculty may reveal a different perspective on course delivery at a distance.

Student Perceptions of Their Distance Education Courses

Distance education is a growing method of instructional delivery at Boise State University. As previously reported (RR 2000-03), the number of distance education courses, enrollments, and credits produced have more than doubled in the past five years. Internet courses have shown especially explosive growth.

As more students enroll in alternative delivery methods and the university invests more in distance education, it becomes critical to understand who is enrolling in distance education classes and why. It is also important to know whether providing distance education courses requires special attention in the areas of student support, access, and satisfaction. Furthermore, as instruction moves from direct student contact in a classroom setting to contact via technology and/or at a satellite location, it is important to determine potential stumbling blocks and their implications on instruction and learning.

Purpose of the study

This study was designed to address the following questions:

1. What is the particular background of distance education students? Questions include:
   - Why are students taking distance education classes? If they couldn't take courses through distance education at Boise State, what would they do?
   - How far-flung are distance education students from the main campus and from the place where they take their distance education class(es)?
   - How much time do distance education students spend on classes, work, and children?

2. How satisfied are students with their distance education courses? Areas include:
   - Administrative and technical support
   - Equipment and facilities
   - Instruction
   - Interaction with the instructor and other students
3. Do students have adequate access to support services? Areas include:
   - Library
   - Registration
   - Bookstore
   - Financial aid
   - Academic advising and tutoring

4. Do students report that they show similar behaviors in their distance education classes as they do in classes that relied primarily on paper and pencil assignments and face-to-face lectures and discussions (e.g., ask for clarification, search for an answer rather than ask the instructor, apply learning to the "real world")?

5. What do students report are the greatest barriers to their successful completion of their distance education class(es)?

6. Are answers to the above questions different depending upon the method of delivery of the distance education class?

Methodology

Based on input from a small group gathered to identify questions that needed to be addressed in distance education, a survey for students enrolled in distance education classes was developed (see Appendix A for a copy of the survey). The group consisted of Janet Atkinson, Director of Distance Education; Stan Brings, Associate Dean, College of Applied Technology; David Cox, Associate Professor, Instructional and Performance Technology; Jim Girvan, Associate Dean, College of Health Sciences; Ben Hambelton, Director of the Simplot-Micron Instructional Technology Center; Joyce Harvey-Morgan, Dean of Extended Studies; Lamont Lyons, Professor, Foundations, Technology, and Secondary Education; Larry Reynolds, Professor, Economics; and Shelton Woods, Associate Professor, History (now Associate Dean of the College of Social Sciences and Public Affairs). The group was facilitated by Marcia Belcheir, Coordinator of Institutional Assessment.

The survey was administered to all 1,095 students that the Registrar's office identified as enrolled in a distance education class during the spring of 2001. The survey was mailed to students in April without any follow-up. A total of 379 useable responses were received for a response rate of 35%.

In order to compare instructional delivery methods, students were asked to identify how they were receiving instruction in their distance education classes that semester: through (a) the internet, (b) one or two-way audio and/or video allowing interaction with the instructor, (c) videotapes or TV, or (d) the instructor comes to the off-campus classroom. Since a number of students selected multiple delivery methods for their courses, students couldn't be assigned to only one group and direct comparisons could not be made between the groups (i.e., internet vs. one or two-way AV vs. videotapes vs. direct instruction). Instead, all students who selected a delivery method (e.g., internet) were compared to all students who did not select that method. Students, therefore, could appear in more than one group.

Results

What was the background of distance education students?

As shown by Table 1, most respondents were enrolled in internet courses. Over half (55%) were enrolled solely in internet courses, and an additional 12% were taking internet courses along with an additional method of delivery.

Slightly more than half (54%) of the students reported that they had taken other distance education courses prior to the spring 2001 term. Students had a variety of reasons for taking distance education classes (see Table 2). The most frequently mentioned reason, indicated by

80% of respondents, was that the time was convenient and/or flexible. Over half of the respondents said that they were taking distance education classes because it was difficult to get to the main campus. Slightly less than a third were taking distance education classes because they liked the technology.

Table 1. Delivery methods used by respondents in course-taking

Delivery method	Number in group	Percent of total
Internet	209	55.29%
One or two-way audio and/or video (AV) allowing interaction	35	9.26%
Videotapes or TV	35	9.26%
Direct instruction in off-campus classroom	12	3.17%
Internet AND 1- or 2-way AV	19	5.03%
Internet AND Videotapes or TV	20	5.29%
Internet AND direct instruction	7	1.85%
1- or 2-way AV AND Videotapes or TV	13	3.44%
1- or 2-way AV AND direct instruction	6	1.59%
Videotapes or TV AND direct instruction	22	5.82%

Table 2. Percentage of students selecting reasons for taking distance education classes by delivery method

Reason	All Ss	Internet	1 or 2-way AV	Tapes or TV	Direct instruction
Time is convenient or flexible	81.41	83.53	63.01*	85.11	84.13
Difficult to get to Boise campus	53.93	53.33	69.86*	40.43*	49.21
Like the technology used to deliver instruction	31.15	38.82*	12.33*	31.91	19.05*
Was required to take a course via distance education methods	4.45	5.88*	2.74	2.13	0.00
Couldn't get course on campus	12.57	12.16	10.96	19.15*	22.22*
Other reason[1]	19.90	20.78	9.59*	20.21	15.87

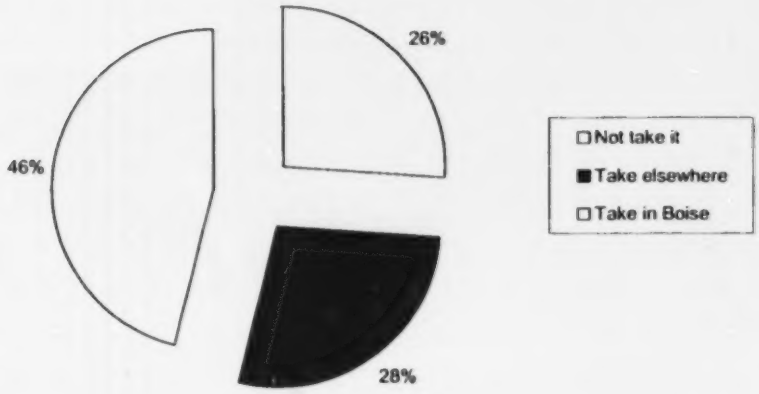
*Statistically significant at p<=.05

Reasons for enrolling in distance education classes differed by delivery method. Students enrolled in internet courses reported most frequently that they liked the technology. Those in one- or two-way audio/video classes with instructor interaction mostly reported that they had difficulties getting to the Boise campus. Students taking their courses through TV or videotapes or through direct instruction at an off-campus site reported most frequently that they enrolled because they couldn't get the course on the Boise campus.

[1] Most "other" reasons were more specific versions of those already listed. A majority of responses indicated that it was the only way the program was offered, the course wasn't offered on campus, or geography made it difficult to get to campus (e.g., living in Georgia). Others mentioned problems with work schedules or child care.

As a follow-up question, students were asked what they would do if they couldn't take courses through distance education at Boise State. The largest group (46%) indicated that they would take the course on the Boise campus if they had to. The remainder was evenly split between not taking the course at all and taking it at another institution (see Figure 1 below). Again, differences occurred by delivery method. Those taking courses via the internet were more likely to take the course at another institution instead of coming to campus. Those taking courses through TV or videotapes or through direct instruction at an off-campus site were more likely to come to Boise to take the class.

Figure 1. What students would do without distance education

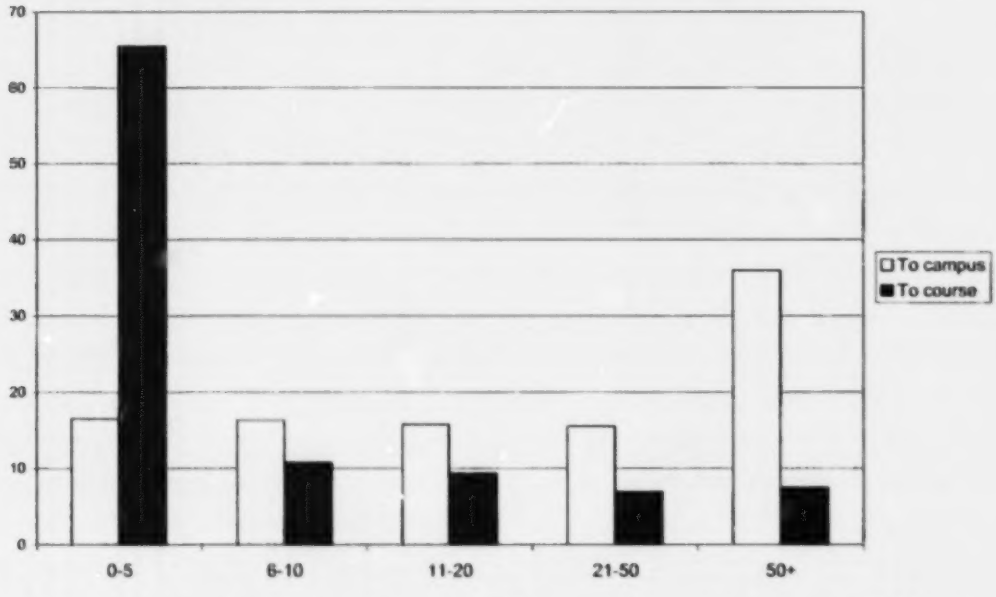


As shown by Figure 2, the largest group of distance education students was living over 50 miles from the Boise campus. This group, however, still only accounted for 36% of the total number of students. Students taking courses via the internet had the greatest number of students living more than 50 miles away (43%), while students taking classes via TV and videotape had fewer numbers (14%) than the entire group. Students taking courses through one- or two-way audio/video were more likely to live between 11 and 50 miles from the Boise campus than students in general.

In contrast, students were living quite close to the location where their courses were delivered. Over 75% lived ten miles or less from where their courses were given, and over 65% lived 5 miles or less from the location of their courses. Internet students were especially likely to indicate they lived five miles or less from their course (no surprise), while students in other modes of delivery lived somewhat further away. Students in direct instruction courses traveled the furthest to take their courses.

Most distance education students worked, with over 60% reporting spending more than 30 hours per week on work. Almost 40% also reported spending more than 30 hours per week on care for

Figure 2. Distance to Boise campus and to course location



dependent children living at home. In contrast, only 2% reported spending more than 30 hours per week on coursework and over 60% reported spending 10 hours or less. Details can be found in Table 3 below. Compared to prior data gathered on freshman and seniors (see Research Report 2000-04), distance education students appear to spend more time on work and children and less on coursework than the "average" student.

Table 3. Time spent per week on classes, work, and children

Time spent on:	Number of hours spent per week (percent selecting)						
	5 or less	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	31+
Classes	27.37	34.74	19.21	9.47	3.68	3.42	2.11
Work	13.08	2.72	1.91	7.36	5.99	6.27	62.67
Children	42.68	4.88	3.35	4.88	3.05	3.05	38.11

Again, differences occurred based on delivery method. Those taking 1- or 2-way audio and/or video classes reported spending significantly less time on coursework than average (44%

reported spending less than 5 hours per week). Those taking internet courses reported spending more time on work than average and less on childcare responsibilities.

How satisfied are students with their distance education courses?

Students were generally satisfied with their distance education classes. Mean ratings were above 3.0 for every item (where a "3" indicated they were "somewhat satisfied" and a "4" indicated they were very satisfied). Students were most satisfied with the facilities, equipment, and instructor skill at using the delivery method. They were least satisfied with their interactions with other students, as well as with the instructor. Still, less than 20 % of students indicated they were dissatisfied with the level of interaction. See Table 4 for further details.

Differences by delivery method were apparent, but only for interactions with the instructor and other students. Specifically, students receiving instruction through 1 or 2-way audio/video were less satisfied with instructor interactions than other groups were. This group was also less satisfied with interactions with other students compared to other groups. Students receiving direct instruction were more satisfied with the quality of interactions with other students. No other differences were found.

Table 4. Satisfaction with aspects of distance education delivery and support

Aspect being rated:	Mean Response	Percent who were:			
		1- Very Dissatisfied	2- Somewhat Dissatisfied	3- Somewhat Satisfied	4- Very Satisfied
Administrative support from the university	3.36	2.67	9.60	36.53	51.20
Technical support (personnel)	3.43	1.91	7.10	36.89	54.10
Equipment needed	3.49	1.61	5.65	34.95	57.80
Facilities	3.51	0.90	4.20	38.14	56.76
Ability to receive good instruction using this delivery method	3.39	3.44	9.52	32.01	55.03
Instructor skill at using delivery method	3.46	4.76	6.35	27.25	61.64
Instructor feedback	3.35	5.84	10.88	25.73	57.56
Interactions with the instructor	3.27	6.37	11.14	32.10	50.40
Interactions with other students	3.18	5.96	13.28	37.67	43.09

Do distance education students have adequate access to support services?

Distance education students generally felt that they had adequate support and access to resources. Registration was an area where students seemed particularly pleased, with only 5% indicating

that they lacked adequate access to registration. Gaining access to the books was another area where students were generally pleased. Only about 10% of students seemed to have difficulty in this area. Further details are shown in Table 5 below.

While almost every student indicated that registration and obtaining books were issues that applied to them, a substantial number of students felt most of the other areas did not apply. Around half, for example, marked "N/A" to the areas of laboratory facilities, financial aid, and tutoring services. When these "N/A" responses were eliminated from the analysis, it became clear that the areas of greatest dissatisfaction were adequate access to tutoring services (41% disagreed that they had adequate access) and financial aid (35% disagreed).

Table 5. Access to services through distance education

Item:	Mean [2]	Percent who:[3]				
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	N/A
I have adequate access to library resources	3.16	3.16 (3.47)	10.26 (11.47)	46.58 (51.16)	31.05 (34.10)	8.95
I have adequate access to laboratory facilities	2.87	4.49 (9.60)	8.71 (18.64)	21.90 (46.89)	11.61 (24.86)	53.30
I have adequate access to registration	3.35	1.06 (1.08)	3.96 (4.03)	52.77 (53.76)	40.37 (41.13)	1.85
I have adequate access to the Extended Studies office	3.02	3.45 (5.24)	9.81 (14.92)	34.48 (52.42)	18.04 (27.42)	34.22
I have adequate access to the bookstore (or other method of obtaining books)	3.20	2.63 (2.74)	7.89 (8.22)	53.42 (55.62)	32.11 (33.42)	3.95
It was easy to deal with financial aid process from a distance	2.74	6.88 (13.47)	11.11 (21.76)	21.69 (42.49)	11.38 (22.28)	48.94
I am satisfied with the academic advising I received	2.94	5.82 (7.24)	14.02 (17.43)	39.68 (49.34)	20.90 (25.99)	19.58
I have adequate access to tutoring services when I need them	2.63	5.32 (10.64)	15.43 (30.85)	21.81 (43.62)	7.45 (14.89)	50.00

A number of areas also had differences depending upon the delivery method of the course. Students enrolled in courses delivered through videotapes or the TV felt they had less access than other groups to library resources, laboratory facilities, registration, the Extended Studies office, the bookstore, and tutoring services when needed. Students in internet courses felt they

[2] After N/A responses were eliminated. Responses were coded so that higher numbers indicated more agreement. The maximum response was a "4".

[3] Percentages in parentheses indicate the percent agreeing or disagreeing after the N/A responses were removed

had less access than other groups to laboratory facilities and tutoring services. Students in one- or two-way audio and/or video courses felt they had less access than other groups to the bookstore and to tutoring services. Thus, tutoring services appeared to be the biggest issue; all delivery methods except direct instruction off-campus were less pleased with access in this area. Students using videotapes or TV felt they had the least overall access as evidenced by differences in five of the eight areas surveyed.

What pedagogical issues do students report?

To gauge possible educational benefits and/or challenges due to the delivery method, students were asked to compare their distance education classes to similar courses they had taken that relied primarily on paper and pencil assignments, face-to-face lectures and discussion in six areas. As shown in Table 6, often the most frequent response was that they acted about the same in the two venues.

Some differences, however, were apparent. In distance education courses, students reported being more likely to search for an answer to their questions rather than ask the instructor. They were also more likely to apply what they were learning to "real world" problems and to indicate that they enjoyed the course. They were less likely to discuss the ideas and concepts of the course with the instructor.

Students in internet courses differed from other groups in four of the six areas. Compared to others, they were more likely to ask for clarification when they did not understand something, apply what they had learned to the "real world", indicate they enjoyed the course, and also tell the instructor when they had complaints about the course.

Students in one- or two-way audio/video classes indicated they were less likely to discuss ideas of the course with the instructor, indicate they enjoyed the course, or tell the instructor they had a complaint about the course—all communications issues. Students receiving direct off-campus instruction showed only one difference: compared to other delivery methods, they were more likely to discuss the ideas and concepts of the course with the instructor.

Thus, communication appeared to be the biggest difference between distance education and traditional courses. In addition, students in internet courses and direct off-campus instruction had less difficulties with communication compared to other groups.

Table 6. Comparison of distance education and traditional courses on student behavior

Compared to a traditional course, how likely were you to:	Mean response[4]	Percent who responded:					
		1- Much less likely	2- Somewhat less likely	3- About the same	4- Somewhat more likely	5- Much more likely	6- N/A
Ask for clarification when you didn't understand something	2.94	10.76	23.36	40.16	11.29	13.65	0.79
Search for an answer to your questions rather than ask the instructor	3.95	1.84	2.89	29.47	29.21	36.05	0.53
Apply what you are learning to "real world" problems	3.49	2.36	5.77	51.44	16.54	20.47	3.41
Discuss the ideas and concepts of the course with the instructor	2.61	18.90	29.66	28.35	12.86	8.40	1.84
Indicate you enjoy this course	3.30	7.39	13.72	40.90	14.78	21.64	1.58
Tell the instructor you have a complaint about the course	2.95	10.61	13.53	49.07	15.38	7.43	3.98

What barriers do students report that prevent them from completing their distance education courses?

Students were also asked to name three of the greatest barriers to the successful completion of their distance education courses. Almost all responses could be related to course issues (i.e., course delivery method), time issues, personal issues (related to students' private lives), administrative (outside class, but within the university) or technical issues (related to lack of technical resources and/or technological failures or shortcomings).
The structure used to analyze the responses can be found in Table 7 below. Note that delivery method was the barrier mentioned most frequently and comprised more than one-third of the responses. Time was also an issue for about 20% of the distance education students. About one student in eight mentioned technology as a barrier to their success. After these top three barriers, the remaining barriers mentioned accounted for less than a quarter of the responses. A few students (8%) indicated that there were no particular barriers to their success in distance education classes.

[4] After eliminating all N/A responses

Table 7. Categories of barriers to completion of distance education courses

	# of Comments	% of Total
Delivery Method	**320**	**37%**
Lack of interaction	*131*	*15 %*
Course structure	*105*	*12 %*
Accessing resources	*59*	*7 %*
Other	*25*	*3 %*
Time:	**168**	**19%**
Lack of time-general	*82*	*9 %*
Personal commitments	*53*	*6 %*
Course work takes too much time	*33*	*4 %*
Technology	**112**	**13 %**
Personal	**93**	**11%**
Motivation/self-discipline	*71*	*8 %*
Other	*22*	*3 %*
Administrative	**74**	**9 %**
Cost	*26*	*3 %*
Course availability	*22*	*3 %*
Obtaining course materials	*14*	*2 %*
Administrative support	*12*	*1 %*
None	**69**	**8 %**
Other	**28**	**3 %**

Delivery Method Barriers

The greatest barrier to course completion that students reported related to the course and/or its delivery method. These accounted for 37% of the responses and covered interactions with others, the structure of the course, and accessing necessary resources.

Lack of interaction with the instructors and other students was the most frequent response in this category. Some students reported that lack of interaction limited their enjoyment of the class. One student reported being " bored with the read and report process--miss discussion side of learning." For another student, the greatest barrier was " lack of enthusiasm for learning in absence of feedback from instructor and students." Other responses dealt with difficulties communicating with the instructor. Not being able to ask questions and get immediate clarification slowed down the learning process for some students. As one student stated, it "takes

more time when you can't get your questions answered." According to some students, the quality and clarity of communication between students and instructors was also negatively affected.

Course Structure/Presentation: The way that the course material was presented was the next most frequent delivery method challenge for students. Lacking lectures, face-to-face instruction, and discussions made learning the material more difficult for some. One student reported: "It's easier for me to learn the material in a classroom setting." The emphasis on reading as the main learning activity was problematic for some students. Students reported that there was too much reading and "only one type of learning-READING!" Students also responded that the lack of variety in instructional methods and activities decreased the effectiveness of the course.

Lack of clarity also fell under this category. Students reported that tests, grading, directions and lectures were unclear. Not knowing what the instructor expected was the next most common response. Having to work in groups or teams completed the responses in this category. One student explained the greatest barrier was the " requirement to do a team project with distance students. The reason I elected distance ed was to only have to deal with my schedule."

Accessing Resources: The remaining responses in this category dealt with difficulties accessing resources necessary for the course. In one third of these responses, students said that course lectures and videos were on at inconvenient times, mostly in the middle of the night and/or that it was hard to remember to record them. Another third of these responses related to the challenges caused by not having access to outside resources such as the library, tutoring, computer labs, research materials, and subjects for research. The remaining responses dealt with difficulties such as parking and childcare caused by required trips to campus and field trips.

Time as a Barrier

A total of 19% of the responses related to not having enough time. The majority of these responses dealt with general lack of time. The next most common time barrier was having other commitments such as work and family. As one student said: " I work full-time so it is hard to find enough time for the course work." The remaining responses related to the courses taking too much time. Some students reported that the courses required too much work and moved too fast. Others reported that distance education courses took more time and effort than regular classes.

Personal Barriers

Barriers relating to students' private lives accounted for 11% of the responses. The majority of the responses related to difficulties with motivation and self-discipline. Among typical responses were the following:

- " My personal motivation to keep up with coursework with no set class time. "
- " Personal focus to stay on top of class."
- " Procrastination."
- " Harder on stay on task without as much reinforcement."

Technology Barriers

Though these were DE classes, issues with technology accounted for only 13 % of the responses. Some students reported not having the necessary technology such as internet access while

traveling or a VCR. The majority of these responses, though, related to malfunctions and breakdowns of technology. Getting booted out of chat rooms, difficulties logging on to the internet, Blackboard and the BSU server being down, slow downloads and difficulties with audio were among the most common complaints, with internet access being the most reported technological barrier.

Administrative Barriers

A total of 9 % of all responses were related to administrative issues outside of the course, but within the university. Students reported that the high cost of courses and limited availability of courses were the greatest barriers and accounted for the majority of these responses. Most of the remaining responses dealt with difficulties obtaining course materials such as books, packets and software, especially receiving them on time. Lack of administrative support from BSU and/or specific departments (difficulties registering, poor advising, BSU "red tape") completed this area.

Did the reported barriers differ by delivery method?

Different delivery methods require different technologies. In addition, it appears that different "kinds" of students migrate to the different delivery methods. It is no surprise, therefore, that some barriers were more commonly associated with some delivery methods compared to others.

Internet students, for example, were more likely to report time as a barrier. Recall, too, that internet students were typically working more hours per week. They were also most likely to report group or team work as a barrier, perhaps for the same reason or perhaps because internet courses require more group activities. Finally, internet students were twice as likely to report technology as a barrier compared to students using other delivery methods. On the other hand, students taking AV and TV courses reported that lack of interaction was a barrier, probably due to the nature of the delivery method.

Summary and Conclusions

This study was designed to assess student perceptions of distance education from the point of view of those who were already enrolled in distance education classes. The study sought to answer questions about student background, satisfaction with courses, access to support services, pedagogical issues, and perceived barriers to success in distance education classes. Though the study covered students enrolled in all methods of distance education delivery, about two-thirds of the respondents were enrolled in internet courses.

Slightly more than half the students were "old-timers," having taken previous distance education classes. By far, most students were enrolled because the time was convenient or flexible. In addition, students indicated that it was difficult to get to the Boise campus. About half, however, said they would take the course on the Boise campus if they had to. The remainder were evenly split between not taking the course at all and taking it at another institution.

Students had multiple priorities that competed with their education. About 60% worked more than 30 hours per week and spent time on family responsibilities. Internet students reported spending more time on work than average and less on childcare responsibilities.

Students were generally satisfied with their distance education courses, with over 80% being satisfied with aspects ranging from administrative and technical support to interactions with others. They also felt they had adequate access to most resources. Access to tutoring, however, was the greatest problem area for those who wanted it.

Students also reported that many of their behaviors were the same in distance education classes as in the traditional classes. There was strong agreement, however, that in distance education classes, students were more likely to search for an answer to their questions than ask the instructor. They were also less likely to discuss the ideas and concepts of the course with the instructor.

Differences in student behavior were found depending upon the delivery method. Compared to others, students in internet courses were more likely to ask for clarification when they didn't understand something, apply what they had learned to the "real world," indicate they enjoyed the course and also tell the instructor when they had complaints. Thus, communication appeared to be the biggest issue, with internet students have greater access to communication than students in other delivery methods.

Students also reported that the delivery of the course, particularly lack of interaction with other students and the instructor, was the greatest barrier to their success. Lack of time was the second greatest barrier, perhaps because so many of these students were both working and caring for families. Again, the lack of interaction was particularly acute for those in TV and AV courses, while time was a larger factor for those in internet courses.

Findings from this study indicate that distance education classes are a convenient and satisfactory way for students to gain further education. About one-fourth of students reported they would be unable to take classes without distance education delivery. The internet is the most popular and satisfactory way for students to take classes, especially since interaction can remain fairly high with this delivery method. This is especially important since the lack of interaction was the greatest barrier to student success. Courses taught by AV or TV seem to have the greatest drawbacks.

These results, of course, are entirely from the student perspective. A companion survey which was given to faculty may reveal a different perspective on course delivery at a distance.

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